

Analysis of juliana barr's theory on indian communities



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Juliana Barr. *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman: Indians and Spaniards in the Texas Borderlands*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press).

2007. ix + 397 pp . \$24. 00 paperback.

Juliana Barr focuses on the Texas borderlands and the Caddos, Apaches, Payayas, Karankawas, Wichitas, and Comanches. Her research demonstrates how these bands retained control over their homelands and how they left the French and Spaniards no choice but to culturally adapt to indigenous practices. Barr argues that these encounters were molded by the kin-based systems of the Indian communities, their traditional diplomatic practices and rituals, and the social structures that deferred to matrilineal households. She contends that the Texas borderland experience was vastly different than Indian-European interactions in New Mexico and Arizona, where the Spaniards were able to subordinate and control the native peoples, often forcing them into labor and converting them to Catholicism. In Texas, the indigenous peoples did not allow themselves to become victims of the Spaniards. The tables were turned and the Texas Indians controlled the interactions. Unlike Richard White's *Indians of the Great Lakes region*, there was no "middle ground." Europeans had to abide by to the native practices of diplomacy. She describes "a world in which Indians dictated the terms of conduct, diplomacy, alliance, and enmity in their interactions with the Spaniards." (7-8)

When Europeans first encountered the Caddos in 1686, they were impressed by the native villages. Their cabins were forty to fifty feet high and one Spaniard remarked, that the Caddo villages "had nothing barbarous but the name." (21) The Caddos were receptive to the Europeans because they

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decided they could be valuable allies because of the guns and horses the Europeans came to trade. Alliances between the indigenous people and the Europeans was constantly influenced the Indians' traditions.

They developed elaborate public welcoming rituals conducted by the male hierarchy. The Caddos used the same methods of diplomacy as they did when they did business with other bands. The French culture was similar to that of the Caddos, and they shared Caddo values without expecting the Caddos to adopt French doctrine. The French allowed them to continue their sovereignty and recognized the elevated status of women in Caddo culture. The French were open to become integrated into the Caddo matrilineal system in order to trade their goods with the Indians. The same cannot be said of the Spaniards. They did not understand native culture and traditions centered on matrilineal kinship and immediately tried to change it. Spanish soldiers and missionaries tried to force their dogma on the Texas Indians.

The situation was further complicated by the lack of Spanish women. The Indians placed much value on women and considered them to be vital to survival of their culture. The presence of women was considered to be a sign of peaceful intentions and a commitment by the Spanish to peace and stable relationships. Because the Spanish had no women and children with them, the natives considered this to be an indication that the Spaniards were in Texas as aggressors. At first, the Caddos believed the Spaniard's images of the Virgin Mary was meant as a signal of their appreciation of the value of females, but they were soon disillusioned. Spaniards did not understand that in these native cultures, gender structured social and political relationships.

Women played important central roles in hospitality rituals, and fictive kin relationships were vital to creating truces.

The Spanish soldiers frequently abused and mistreated women. Their missionaries attempted to convert Indian women and mistook their openness to be a sign of promiscuity that needed to be rectified. The Indian communities came under pressure from the Spanish missionaries to abandon their deviant ideas about gender and alter basic fundamentals of their societies. In response to this pressure and the mistreatment of native women by the Spaniards which violated cultural and political protocols, in 1693 the Caddos drove the Spaniards out of their territory and into central Texas.

Apache women played a significant diplomatic role because they were associated with peace and were allowed to move freely throughout the territory and “ across social and political boundaries as mediators and emissaries.” (13) Barr demonstrates how the “ diplomatic overtures begun by Apache women ended with the meeting of Spanish and Apache women to hammer out a truce.” (174) Political use of female captives were often brokers of peace. In response to Apache horse raids, the Spaniards began taking Apache women and children as prisoners of war or as slaves and refused to return them to their families. These captives were then used them as bartering tools. This created increased tensions with the kin-based native peoples. In addition to their role in diplomatic relations, women were also vital to strengthening alliances between the Indian groups and the Europeans. In the early years, Apache women were captured by Caddo men and purchased by the French.

Eventually, the Apaches and Spaniards reached a military alliance in mutual defense against attacks by Comanches, Wichitas, and Caddos, but only after the Spaniards recognized the value of women in regards to diplomacy. As a show of their peaceful intentions, the Spaniards freed their Apache female slaves. In good faith, the Apache sent women to Spanish presidios to convey their reciprocity towards peace. The Apache women and children who were prisoners of the Spaniards learned Spanish and served as negotiators and translators. Women and children were traded back and forth between the Indians and Europeans. They also served as symbols of peace. According to Barr, " Native American constructions of social order and of political and economic relationships-defined by general terms of kinship-were at the crux of Spanish-Indian politics." (2)

According to Barr, these raids placed women at the very " center of violence and diplomacy." (164) As the Spaniards finally came to understand the importance of women in the Indian communities, they were allowed to mingle and intermarry with the Indians. As a result, Spaniards were able to achieve some political power and the natives attained economic gain. Barr points out that native women not only served as negotiators in diplomacy, but they also were full contributors to Texas history. Although men of the different warring groups established truces, " but customary practices involving women proved crucial to maintaining the peace agreements that followed." (246)

Barr's research is important to Plains Indian and Texas historiography because she demonstrates how the Texas Indians controlled the rules of engagement between the indigenous peoples and the Europeans. The author <https://assignbuster.com/analysis-of-juliana-barrs-theory-on-indian-communities/>

distinguishes three phases of Spanish-native interactions which fall under the categories of trade, mission, and settlement. She contends that the natives were demographically superior to the Europeans. The author also postulates that gender was the foundation on which the native kinship systems in the Texas borderlands operated. She contends that these Spanish-Indian relationships were not based on hierarchies of race and class, but instead relied on gender. According to Barr, gender was the basis of power of the Caddos, Apaches, Karankawas, Wichitas, and Comanches. This allowed these native groups to negotiate with Europeans through “ gendered standards and practices in political economies of gift giving and hospitality, alliances instituted in joint family settlements, honors and dishonors inherent in violence and war, exchanges of women through intermarriage, captivity and hostage taking, and political relationships conceived through fictive and real kinship.” (289)

Barr’s main argument is that the potential for success or failure of Europeans to forge associations with the various native groups depended on the Europeans’ capability to understand and accommodate gendered kinship practices. She also maintains that the various Indian groups had no concept of state; therefore, their political organizations were based on age and gender. She contends that in cross-cultural encounters, gender was performative, meaning “ not what people are, but what people do through distinctive postures, gestures, clothing, ornamentation, and occupations.” (11) Thus, gender serves as a form of nonverbal communication in situations where there is no common language.

To substantiate her arguments, Barr has recreated the social structures of the different Indian groups and uses them to analyze the accounts of the encounters. Because there were no original native sources, Barr relied heavily on Spanish sources. As a result she has had to make some conjectures to understand Indian perspectives on power and peace. Barr uses a variety of primary and secondary sources. She has included maps and illustrations to help the reader understand the ever-changing alliances and interactions. Barr invites her readers to “ stand metaphorically in Indian country” and to contemplate Spanish colonialism in eighteenth century Texas from the perspective of the Texas Indians. (295) Her book is a study of interethnic relations which encourages historians to explore the perspective of gendered practices of peace.

Juliana Barr has been an associate professor at the Duke University since 2015. Dr. Barr previously was associated with Rutgers University and the University of Florida-Gainesville. She specializes in early American history, the Spanish borderlands, American Indians, and women and gender.